

CONNECTICUT POST

Commuter banking

People's honored for easing employees' rides

By Alejandra Navarro

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BRIDGEPORT—People's Bank has landed a spot on a list that highlights the Best Workplaces for Commuters in the tri-state area.

During a press conference Monday at People's Bank's headquarters, representatives from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and MetroPool Inc. recognized People's Bank for its efforts to encourage employees to leave their cars at home.

Area transportation agencies developed a local list based on the EPA's national program to recognize commuter-friendly companies in the tri-state area.

The EPA will release the official Metro New York list in May, giving area companies some of whom have already been recognized by the EPA for commuter programs time to get on the list by offering commuting benefits, such as carpooling cash incentives, shuttle buses and transit subsidies.

The Connecticut and New York transportation departments, the Transportation Strategy Board, the New York Metropolitan Transportation Council and MetroPool collaborated to produce the list.

MetroPool, which offers transportation services in Fairfield County and several New York counties, will work with area businesses to start commuter programs and enhance existing ones, said Peggy Hetherington, MetroPool spokeswoman.

MetroPool estimates that a company with 1,000 workers can save employees \$13,000 each year in taxes, and \$160,000 each year in fuel, parking and vehicle costs.

A third of the 1,800 employees at People's Bank take part in its commuter program, which includes transit vouchers worth \$65, cash incentives to carpool and a guaranteed ride program, according to information provided by People's Bank.

"Our employees are able to come into Bridgeport refreshed," said John A. Klein, chairman and chief executive officer of People's Bank. Klein is also a member of the Transportation Strategy Board.

Klein said his company uses its commuter benefits as a recruiting tool to attract new employees.

Yale University in New Haven also earned a spot on the list. Yale, MetroPool reported, offers an extensive shuttle service and a homebuyer program, which gives \$25,000 toward the down payment on a house in nearby neighborhoods. So far, more than 500 employees have participated.

Area business leaders said companies with commuter programs benefit from improved productivity from employees who avoid frustrating traffic.

Edward M. Houghton, chairman of MetroPool, said the employees at his company, Stamford-based Pitney Bowes Inc., look ready to work when they step off the shuttle bus the company provides, Houghton said. Some have had time to work on the train, he added.

People who drive in, however, look like they already worked a full day before they even get to the office, he said.